

Two-thirds of all road deaths now on country roads as complacency fuels surge

Renee Ernst's "whole world turned upside down" when a truck collided with her husband's car. It's where the fatal accident occurred that has Australia on notice. SEE THE VIDEO.



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Exclusive: A false sense of safety has prompted a dramatic jump in country road deaths, which now account for two thirds of the national toll.

More than 900 of the 1314 Australians killed in crashes in the past year died on regional, rural and [remote roads](#) – an increase of 10.5 per cent.

And new Australian Road Safety Foundation research has pegged the blame squarely on [driver complacency](#) behind the wheel, which is far greater in the country than city.

“Ultimately it comes down to how we’re how we’re actually using the road and the choices that people are making every single time they use them,” Australian Road Safety Foundation founder and chair Russell White said.

Renee Ernst lost her husband Troy Ernst when a truck allegedly veered onto the wrong side of the road. Picture: Jeff Darmanin

Renee Ernst lost her husband Troy when a truck veered onto the wrong side of the road and collided with his car near Gunnedah, NSW, in December 2024.

“My whole world turned upside down that day,” Mrs Ernst said.

“Everything went black. I felt numb. I was shaking violently, and it’s pretty much been a nightmare ever since that I just can’t seem to wake up from.”

The couple had only been married for nine months.

Troy Ernst died in a car accident in December 2024. Picture: Supplied

“We had so many hopes and dreams and plans for our future, and all that was ripped away on that in the blink of a second,” said Mrs Ernst.

“So people need to realise they’re driving a weapon.”

Mrs Ernst has now become an advocate for road safety, determined to keep her late husband’s legacy alive.

“My new mission in life is to turn my pain into purpose,” she said.

“By doing that is doing interviews like this where I can continue to keep Troy’s legacy alive while spreading the important message of road safety.”



Renee Ernst said losing her husband Troy turned her “whole world turned upside down”. Picture: Supplied

The new research, released ahead of rural road safety month and News Corp’s Bush Summit – both in August – found more than a quarter of drivers think rural roads are safer than city streets.

Alarming, more than half of Australians admit to breaking a road rule on a country road, with 35 per cent believing it was safe to break rules on a country road.

About 36 per cent admitted to speeding followed by driving while fatigued, 21 per cent, and using a mobile phone while driving, 15 per cent.

Men accounted for three out of four regional road deaths while Australians over 40 made up 54 per cent of all deaths.

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Almost one in five fatal crashes involved a heavy vehicle and the majority, or 65 per cent, of fatal country crashes happened during daylight hours.

Regional Development Minister Kristy McBain said road safety was everyone's responsibility and Australians could play their part by following road rules.

"It's really important that everyone takes road safety seriously," she said.

"The slightest mistake can cause lifelong ramifications, so we don't want to see anyone cutting corners."

AAMI CTP Insurance and Advocacy general manager Michelle Bain leads the team that helps people in the aftermath of road accidents.

"It's very devastating," she said.

"Through one momentary loss of concentration or other thing that sometimes leads to lifelong consequences."